



**Black Catholic Ministry Commission
Archdiocese of Milwaukee**

We proclaim to you **what we have seen and heard**,
so that you may also have fellowship with us. (1 Jn 1:3)

June 22, 2020

The Most Reverend Jerome Listecki, Archbishop
Archdiocese of Milwaukee
P.O. 070912
Milwaukee, WI 53207

Dear Archbishop Listecki,

On behalf of the Black Catholic Ministry Commission, Archdiocese of Milwaukee, I enclose our Statement in Response to the Acts of Police Violence in America. The statement was developed as the result of discussion by the Commission and our strong concerns regarding the brutal death of Mr. George Floyd and other African Americans.

Our statement will be shared with the Most Reverend Bishop Shelton J. Fabre, chairman of the USCCB Ad Hoc Committee Against Racism. It will also be shared with Fessahaye Mebrahtu and the Catholic Herald.

It is our hope that this message raises awareness, increases discussion and understanding among people of all backgrounds so that we move forward in positive, effective and meaningful action.

We welcome your sharing our statement as you lead the Archdiocese of Milwaukee in meaningful dialogue on the importance of mutual respect among all people.

The Commission looks forward to participating in dialogues to which we can add voice and positive action throughout the Archdiocese of Milwaukee and in our communities.

God Bless,

Mary Words

Mary Words, Chair
Black Catholic Ministry Commission
Archdiocese of Milwaukee

Enclosure

CC: Fessahaye Mebrahtu, Director of Black Catholic and Ethnic Ministries, Archdiocese of Milwaukee

The Most Reverend Shelton J. Fabre, Chair - USSCB Ad Hoc Committee Against Racism

BLACK CATHOLIC MINISTRY COMMISSION, ARCHDIOCESE OF MILWAUKEE, RESPONDS TO POLICE VIOLENCE IN AMERICA

STATEMENT IN RESPONSE TO ACTS OF POLICE VIOLENCE IN AMERICA

On June 8th members of the Black Catholic Ministry Commission of the Archdiocese of Milwaukee gathered for our monthly meeting and spent part of it discussing troubling events in our country:

In 2014, Eric Garner died from a chokehold by the Police in New York City; Dreasjon “Sean” Reed shot and killed in Indianapolis; Breonna Taylor, an emergency medical technician in Louisville, shot eight times in her bed; Ahmaud Arbery killed while out jogging in a South Georgia neighborhood; and most recently George Floyd in Minneapolis dying from a police officer’s knee on his neck as Mr. Floyd screamed, “I can’t breathe!” The Commission wanted to share with you some of our reflections on these events and on the Black Lives Matter Movement in light of Catholic Social Teachings.

It is no secret that in many places throughout our nation there are tensions between law enforcement and people in the communities that they are sworn “to serve and protect”. These tensions have given rise to further conflicts and the creation of a “Black Lives Matter” versus “Blue Lives Matter” dichotomy. While we cannot ignore or excuse the profound challenges and issues within the Black community, (e.g. Black on Black crime), the focus of this statement is to address the rising tension between many of our brothers and sisters in the Black community and our brothers and sisters in law enforcement.

We condemn all these acts of violence. We recognize that the vast majority of law enforcement officers are not brutal, uncaring and reckless in the exercise of their considerable power and authority; and contrary to stereotypes and media images, the vast majority of Black people are not malevolent, lazy and looking for a handout. However, we are deeply disturbed that so many interactions between people of color and law enforcement have resulted in death and that there often appears to be little legal or professional accountability. We strongly believe that police reform is necessary and critical throughout the country.

Every life in this country should mean something – from conception to natural death. “Black Lives Matter” is not a declaration of self-importance; instead, it is more a declaration of vulnerability. Inherently, all lives cannot matter until Black lives matter. Regrettably, our nation’s history, current events, and a vast array of data on human well-being (income, wealth, health, education, etc.) demonstrate the opposite that Black Lives **Don’t** Matter due to systemic racism.

Our communities need the police. We are grateful for their service and acknowledge their jobs are at times very dangerous. However, when their actions result in numerous senseless deaths of African Americans, we are all affected by this. When this happens, the sense of trust and

common purpose that is essential for creating and maintaining healthy communities is undermined. As one body, we as church are called to express social justice principles, and we are called to strongly affirm the Black Lives Matter foundational principles, standing up for those who have been left out and unheard. Addressing systemic racism and the many forms of de jure and de facto discrimination, particularly in our criminal justice system, is the responsibility of all of us and especially our religious leaders and lawmakers.

Acknowledging the great complexity and deep historical and cultural roots of these issues, we would like to focus on one area – law enforcement – and suggest six concrete things that could be done to lessen the risks of fatal encounters between officers and the people in our communities whom they are sworn to serve and protect.

Without justice there can be no peace, and justice demands that:

1. All human life must be respected and protected equally.
2. Law Enforcement officers are held accountable for their willful negligence and compliance in racist activities and actions; and when justified, as in the death of Mr. George Floyd, they are arrested and prosecuted to the full extent of the law.
3. Chokeholds and other life-threatening forms of physical restraint be banned throughout the country when a suspect is not resisting arrest, and/or is already in custody.
4. Legislation be passed to establish a national database to check personnel records of police officers who apply for law enforcement positions when they relocate.
5. Law Enforcement agencies must improve and expand training in cultural sensitivity and crisis intervention, de-escalation of conflict, and other areas that can help to lessen the risk of violent interactions.
6. More opportunities for officers be created to build healthy and cooperative relationships with communities, especially with our youth.

We further suggest that the following principles of Catholic Social Teachings can assist us in these efforts:

- Life and Dignity of the Human Person—Black lives matter because all lives matter, and until they do, the value of all human life will be diminished.
- Solidarity--In a community as segregated by race and class as Metro Milwaukee, we need to develop ways for people to have honest and respectful conversations on racism so that we can build a stronger sense of the common good.

It is our prayer that People of God within our communities might gain a better understanding of what the “Black Lives Matter” movement is all about. With that understanding, we hope that together we will begin honest conversations about confronting injustice and our universal call to be the heart, the hands and the voice of Christ in our world.

**BLACK CATHOLIC MINISTRY COMMISSION,
ARCHDIOCESE OF MILWAUKEE**

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ARCHDIOCESE OF MILWAUKEE**

Fessahaye Mebrahtu, Director